

"Blue-Grass and Broadway"



MARIA THOMPSON DAVIESS
Author of "BLUE GRASS AND BROADWAY"

THE next time you are thinking of going to the theatre change your mind. Buy *Blue-Grass and Broadway*, by Maria Thompson Daviess, read it yourself, give it to the family, the maid, the telephone girl and the elevator boy and then send it to the soldiers, thus killing two or three hundred birds with one stone. If books can feel, this one will be insufferably conceited at the end of a week or two in camp. It is reported that Marjorie Benton Cooke's *Bambi* proved so popular in camp that the soldiers or lads or boys or whatever you like to call them were afraid to lay it down between readings. *Blue-Grass and Broadway* has stormed the camps in just such a manner. Read what one fighting man has to say of it:

"Say, if you see a book called *Blue-Grass and Broadway*, go to it. It's got all the thrills you want to meet for the next few days—and then some—all about the theatre game, inside dope and great stuff at that. And it's got a little girl from Kentucky in it that'll wind your heart around your neck a couple of times before she's done. The genuine article, believe me. Oh, boy! But I've got to get back to camp and finish it."

"PRIVATE A. E. F."

It is great stuff. Either Miss Daviess

has learned the ropes of the theatrical world pretty well or she is just naturally a good sailor. Being a good deal of a playwright herself, besides a farmer and business woman, she brings a nicely rounded knowledge of the world into her writing. The blue grass grows rather heavily in the middle of Broadway, perhaps, but a Kentucky novelist who knows all about the women who grow up in it, and knows also how well other people enjoy reading of their charms, can afford to make lavish use of her knowledge.

When Patricia Adair of Adairville writes a play to lift the mortgage from her home and save her aged grandfather's life, dresses up in her grandmother's clothes and brings her purring voice and long, curling, tearful lashes to New York to clinch the matter, there isn't a woman above the Mason and Dixon line who will be eat enough to wish her anything but success. There is something about these Kentucky girls, as Miss Daviess admits. One thing we must know. If crape myrtle grows in Westchester county, as Miss Daviess says it does, where, oh, where, is the spot? Give us a bag and a net and lead the way. Let us have one more spray for old sake's sake.

BLUE-GRASS AND BROADWAY. By MARIA THOMPSON DAVIESS. The Century Company. \$1.50.

Haggard the Illimitable

IN dedicating his new novel to Earl Curzon Sir Rider Haggard warns him it has a parable, with application "to our state and possibilities—beneath or beyond these glimpses of the moon." And so it evidently has, but whether by "state and possibilities" Sir Rider means the British Empire or Western civilization or all mankind we are not sure.

For we haven't searched out the parable entire. Can you blame us? If you were shipwrecked on a Pacific island, in the company of a cocker spaniel, a pugnaciously atheistic surgeon, and a High Church clergyman just his opposite—

And if the four of you discovered the relics of a world empire of supermen, 250,000 years lost, and among these relics the superking and his superbeauteous daughter, alive, having lain off that time in crystal coffins in a state of suspended animation—

And if the king were to waft you, by way of the Fourth Dimension, to his dead capital city in the bowels of the earth, where he and his people found refuge from barbarians who attacked them with airplanes and high explosives when they dwelt above—

And if thence he were to conduct you still deeper, and show you the natural gyroscope, mountain size, on whose transits along a grooved path depends the balance of the earth—

And if, meanwhile having toured Europe and America and the Great War in your company (thanks to his power of liberating your astral being and his own), and not having thought much of modern civilizations as he found them, and being afflicted with an overgrown ego of the imperial kind, he were to propose to switch this balancing gyroscope, and thus to cause the inundation of the present continents and the elevation of new ones, and to start the world all over again, with the eastern peoples for breeding stock, and you and that beauteous daughter of his for king and queen—

And if you discovered as you went along that the daughter and your late wife were eternally identical in spirit, while you yourself were the reemodiment of a prince whom the daughter had loved and forsaken 2,500 centuries before—

If all this were going on, would you be able to take in parables and profit by moral lessons? We weren't! We did make something hazy of the circumstance that the faith of the mulish Bastin, the preacher, showed up better against the

marvels and temptations than the scientific doubts of Bickley the surgeon. We also made something, which we disliked, of the fact that Bastin had converted the Princess Yva to his bastinado creed immediately before the self-sacrifice by which she thwarted Papa's world wrecking design. Our reason for disliking it was that if Bastin's Christianity is the genuine thing, our humble beliefs in the matter have been misled.

Devotees of Sir Rider Haggard will perceive from the foregoing that he is back in something of his *She* and *Ayesha* form; and that years have not sovered nor customers staled his illimitable imagination. Yva the princess descends in direct creative line from Ayesha; if Humphrey Arbuthnot, the I-narrator, isn't Kallikrates, at least he is what he needs to be in order to tell the tale. Bastin is an amusing ass (we intend no irreverence; Sir Rider takes great pains to make an ass of him) at first.

On that astral tour which Humphrey Arbuthnot makes in King Oro's company, the United States is visited; but—"at this point there is a gap in Mr. Arbuthnot's MS., so Oro's reflections on the Neutral Nations, if any, remain unrecorded." What a pity! Were they unrecorded, we wonder, in the original manuscript? Do they remain so in English editions? Was a deletion made somewhere, by some one, after the United States got over being a Neutral Nation?

We wish we had time, space and energy for a prolix essay on the indicative values of the names invented by authors for their characters. But readers sensitive to such values will not need it; the very first line of Page One of the novel: "I suppose that I, Humphrey Arbuthnot, should begin this history—" will give them the pitch and tone of the whole zenith-to-nadir performance. Humphrey Arbuthnot—quintessence and epitome! When the World Shook is the very humphrey-arbuthnot-most book that there could be.

It is the cosmos-wandering Let's Pretend of the Rider Haggard of old, clad in a calico print emulation of Joseph's coat, burdened with a parable too heavy for its back, and turned loose in the literary sphere of the minor wild fiction wherewith the *Strand Magazine* used to thrill our boyhoods.

WHEN THE WORLD SHOOK. By H. RIDER HAGGARD. Longmans, Green & Co. \$1.60.

Musings in the Church of Anatole

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

IN reading the finely conceived and written book on Anatole France by Lewis Piaget Shanks I suddenly recalled that some years ago, while rooting around in ancient schisms and sects, I had run across the Fathers of the Church of Anatole. Anatole France and Thomas Hardy remain the two Titans left on the Olympus of Literature. The slopes below have a long waiting list, but on those heights a few are chosen and none is called.

The Fathers of the Church of Anatole were called the Acataleptics, a sect from wayback opposed to the Gnostics, who were the mystical prohibitionists of their day and knew it all. The doctrine of the Acataleptics was the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of all things. Life passeth the understanding. Pyrrho is the supreme Acataleptic among the ancients. Anatole France is the supreme Acataleptic among the ultra-moderns. Between stands the great figure of Michel de Montaigne, on whose tomb is graven that profoundly religious question, "What Do I Know?"

If catalepsy is a "possession," Acatalepsy is a state of ultimate freedom. "The story of an intellectual odyssey" Mr. Shanks beautifully calls the career of Anatole France from the publication of *Alfred de Vigny, étude* (1868) to *What Our Dead Say* (1916). Odyssey, indeed! for the adventures of Ulysses-Anatole on the way were worth the recording, and the destination is of no importance. Anatole France is the Ulysses of literature, as Victor Hugo was the Homer of creeds. The world is a whimsey. Nothing can be proven; nothing disproven. "Eureka" was uttered by a madman (an ironical madman, Poe). Anatole smiles and smiles (like Renan) and is not a villain, for, if he has given us irony as shield to fend the slings and arrows of outrageous gods, he has also uttered the word Pity. Apollo

and Dionysos are his gods—Contemplation and Ecstasy. Eat, drink and make merry, for to-morrow you may be an immortal, and it shall be asked of you, "Did you love My earth or reject it?" For the kingdom of the Anatolian heaven is made up of sane pagans.

The vast smile of the great Frenchman dissolves all systems. The nets woven by the Teutonic minded will never strangle him in their folds. Through the walls of all the granite superstitions, whether scientific, political or religious, he passes like a ghost. His solving merriment is a comic fourth dimension. His is the unarithmetical grin. That this pacifist became a warrior in 1914, that he had gone over to Socialism, but complete the irony of his Daemon. He rounded himself out by taking sides. The race, the human, in him (prefigured in that masterpiece, *Cranquebelle*—1904—which John Galsworthy expropriated and called *Justice*) leaped to its feet. France and humanity were merely extensions of Anatole. Nineteen fourteen was a giant retort wherein the individual in him, the literary wizard and indifferent seer disappeared like a snowstorm in a sun. The smile and the tear married and became a sword. The great ghost, Race Solidarity, rose before him like some mythologic beast. His Socialism was a confrontation of the common enemy of man, Selfishness. His intellect foundered in his heart. He became the thing he smiled at. The Abbé Jerome fell on his knees before La Pucelle. He is himself a character out of one of his books. He satirized his own life in that inscrutable August.

In *The Opinions of Jerome Coignard* and *Le Jardin d'Epicure* he is a chemist of visions, the Bean Brummel of Satanus. He analyzed and classified the errors that the world believes to be certainties. He is the taxidermist of human illusions. Finally the great Satirist had his little joke with Anatole, as Anatole had had his superb jests about all things. As Mr.

Shanks says (among all the beautiful things he says in this sympathetically critical book): "Like the homunculus of *Faust*, the romantic Pyrrhonist yields to life's imperative call. He turns to his desk, and there makes a stand against the flux of appearances which Heraclitus first taught by the Ionian Sea."

And why not? Is not France the eternal Don Quixote of civilization? She has the seals of Mount Sinai on her brows. She has always warred for the Invisible, for a thing not seen of the eyes, for Chimera. On the Jacob's ladder of social evolution she has stood on the highest rung. She is the sanity of the world; her socialism is a sane socialism; her individualism a sane individualism; her nationalism a sane nationalism. But Anatole France was not "converted" à la Tolstoi. He did not reject his past and call in the Savonarolas for a bonfire of his books in the Place de la Concorde, as Tolstoi would have done. For his sense of humor perceived that each gesture he had made to life from his birth on the Qua, Malaquais was valid. The great Russian was a freak; Anatole France is a life.

If France had never written anything else, *La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedauque*, *Thais* and *La Révolte des Anges* would have put him into the Pantheon. The first named is, in the opinion of Mr. Shanks, of the very essence of France. I agree with him. It is Latinity in all its reckless glory. In *Thais* one sees the influence of Flaubert. It is the irony of asceticism and sensualism. *The Revolt of the Angels* (a bartender first gave me this book to read—you never can tell!) is a mythology. It is the siege of Lord Abracadabra by the Greenwich Village geniuses of the earth. Not to have read it is not to have read. It is a pity Victor Hugo died before it was written. He would have moved his pontifical chair down a peg.

What is the final "message" that we

get from Anatole France? It is this: An eagle about to take flight from a perch—such should be the attitude of the free, evolving, life curious soul. No thought, no creed, is final; each belief should be only a promontory from which to behold a more distant belief. We should go singing toward the unknown. Without beyondness, without vision, humanity lives in a tomb. Once we cease to believe in any one thing and become spectator and actor, because it is a health gesture, we see the "great process" is not "good" or "evil," but beautiful. We no longer demand a morality, but an aesthetic. We glorify change, seeing in it the method of a timeless miracle. Says Mr. Shanks, "An Epicurean gifted with an active mind, a restless soul ever seeking the unknown, will of course enjoy a longer cycle of pleasures than a mere sensual hedonist." But when will the crowd understand that an Epicurean is not a lobster cormorant and a wine guzzler?

"Life," once said an Imp to me, "is the highest form of organized stupidity, tempered by magnificent illusions; and the Universe is a great epic that a Shakespeare has written with a worm." So might have said the great Anatole, one of the rarest spirits of the age.

To any one who wants to enter the Church of Anatole no better book could be recommended than Mr. Shanks's luminous and vibrant study. His style is as limpid as his master's and his valuations are, in the main, just.

ANATOLE FRANCE. By LEWIS P. SHANKS. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company. \$1.50.

The *Bookman* has completed its first six months since it was taken over by the George H. Doran Company, and a bound volume of the first six numbers has been put forth, showing many new and notable names among contemporary writers on its contributors' list.